

## Learning Communities: NEBRASKA v. Peer Institutions

“Learning Communities” (LC) is a term used widely in higher education with great variation in LC structure. Research shows that participation in *any* LC model increases student success. However, models differ widely among the Big 10 and our geographically-peer institutions. Different models emphasize different components of a student’s experience. At NEBRASKA, we utilize a LC model designed to have the greatest impact on all areas of student success. Our model is fairly rare and positively distinguishes us from our peer institutions.

### Learning Communities at NEBRASKA:

- **NEBRASKA LCs focus on the whole student**, with equal commitments to academic success, social/residential/co-curricular success, and professional development opportunities. At most peer institutions, LCs are primarily residential w/ some academic options or primarily academic with some residential options. Our equal commitment to academic and student life make NEBRASKA’s LCs stand out.
- **NEBRASKA LCs create strong academic and residential cohorts.** Students share an interest in an academic area related to a:
  - *Major* (e.g.: Business, Music, Engineering, Psychology, English)
  - *Career path* (e.g.: Pre-Health, Pre-Law, Pre-Vet, Teaching)
  - *Lifestyle* (e.g.: ROTC, environmental sustainability, commitment to service/civic engagement)

Students also live together on the same residence hall floor(s). Peer LC programs with a primarily residential focus usually have much broader themes or interest areas. Peer LC programs with a primarily academic focus are likely to be organized around academic inquiry into a topic, which may or may not connect to a major or career path.

- **NEBRASKA LCs are for the full year.** Peer programs may be a full year (more likely for residential-based programs) or only a semester (true for many academic-based programs).
- **NEBRASKA LCs are open to all students** and filled solely on a *first-come, first-served* basis. Nearly all peer LC programs have a competitive application process. At NEBRASKA, we have intentionally chosen to be a non-competitive program so the benefits of LC membership are available to all students.
- **NEBRASKA LCs are affordable.** There is a fee of \$95/year to participate in a Learning Community. This money goes entirely back to the individual student’s co-curricular experience (none of the \$95 goes to administrative costs). This is the lowest LC fee among peer institutions that identify an individual LC fee (costs at other institutions average \$150-\$300/year, with some much higher).

### Benefits of NEBRASKA’s LCs:

National research tells us that Learning Community participation increases student success. In addition, using ten years’ worth of institutional data, we know that students who participate in a Learning Community at NEBRASKA are likely to be more successful.

### On average, NEBRASKA students who participate in a Learning Community:

- Have a higher first-semester GPA
- Take more credits and drop fewer; in other words, they progress to their degree at a better rate
- Are more likely to graduate on time
- Enjoy high student satisfaction (via comments on anonymous programmatic evaluations):
  - “Joining a learning community was the single best decision I made as a freshman in college. I felt more at ease in my classes, I loved my res hall life, and if I needed help with anything, I knew I had a floor full of people who had my back.”
  - “My LC was my home away from home. I LOVED it!”
  - “I met 90% of my closest friends in my learning community. I wouldn’t trade it for anything and encourage new students to get involved with a learning community.”